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The Politics
OF Lying: Govt., Decep
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Fibbers at the Top

THE POLITICS OF LYING: GOVERNMENT DECEPTION, SECRECY, AND POWER. By David Wise. 415 pages. Random House. \$8.95.

When Francis Gary Powers and his U-2 spy plane were shot down over Russia in 1960, President Eisenhower disavowed any knowledge of the espionage mission. Ike lied. It was neither the first nor the biggest fib an American President ever told—but the U-2 episode has become a watershed of sorts, for, as David Wise contends, it “marked the first time that many Americans realized that their government lied.” Only thirteen years later, it would take the patience of Diogenes to find someone with total credence in the government.

It is a quantum leap from the U-2 to Tonkin Gulf and Watergate, but to read this deeply disturbing book is to understand that the destination was inevitable. As Wise (a former Washington bureau chief of the defunct New York Herald Tribune) points out, it has become so much easier for government to lie that deception has become a “regular” habit. A Presidency with expanded powers, a swollen national security bureaucracy and a mania for official secrecy have combined to create, he writes, “a system of institutionalized lying.” And in Wise’s view, denying information to the public is no less serious a sin than unabashedly lying to it.

Censor: Much of Wise’s information is not new; indeed, plenty of it appeared in his previous books (“The U-2 Affair,” “The Invisible Government” and “The Espionage Establishment”—all written with Thomas B. Ross). But what is new is downright alarming—such as the existence of the Wartime Information Security Program, which is a characteristically misleading name for a group of eight men who, at an order from the President, would repair to their headquarters at Western Maryland College and set up machinery to censor all American media.

This the President could do without a declaration of war or even of national emergency. Wise also reveals here for the first time Lyndon Johnson’s tacit admission that the U.S. was involved in the murder of Dominican Republic dictator Rafael Trujillo. Wise indirectly quotes LBJ as saying, “We took care of them,” referring to both Trujillo and President Diem of South Vietnam.

Wise also discloses that in the late 1950s the CIA was secretly training Tibetan soldiers in guerrilla warfare at Camp Hale, Col., then sending them home to fight the Chinese. Several Coloradans nearly twigged when they spotted the Tibetans boarding an Air Force transport. The civilians were forthwith locked in a hangar and one was threatened by a GI carrying a .45 automatic.

Attack: Not surprisingly, ex-newsmen Wise has a lot to say about the performance of the press in stripping away government deceit and secrecy. He concludes that the press is not aggressive enough, particularly in covering the Nixon Administration, which has waged “the most dangerous attack on the nation’s . . . free press since the Alien and Sedition Acts.” How intimidating this Administration has been can be seen in the way it dealt with Newsday after the Long Island daily published a series of articles about Mr. Nixon’s close friend Bebe Rebozo. The paper’s White House correspondent was refused permission to accompany the President to Peking. For the first time, Newsday’s editor, publisher and chief investigative reporter had their income taxes audited. IRS agents also turned up at Newsday offices to investigate company financial records. Presidential press secretary Ron Ziegler denied any of this was connected with the Rebozo series.

At the core of the credibility problem, says Wise, is the government “elite”—those solipsistic policymakers whose “arrogance of power” combined with an “arrogance of mind” has produced an unshakable belief in their “right to lie.” Wise is guardedly optimistic that if the



present security-classification system is scrapped, a “politics of truth” may emerge. He avoids speculating on the more likely possibility—that policymakers will simply become better liars.

—ARTHUR COOPER

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